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Enhancing EFL students' proverb comprehension through the conceptual metaphor approach: A cognitive linguistic perspective

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Abstract

Proverbs in English pose a challenge for EFL learners due to their metaphorical nature. This study compared three approaches to enhance EFL students' proverb comprehension: Conventional-based, Pictorial-based, and Conceptual Metaphor-based. Pre- and post-tests were conducted on 70 EFL students divided into three groups. The Conventional-based Approach was used with 22 students, the Pictorial-based with 25, and the Conceptual Metaphor-based with 23. A one-way ANOVA revealed significant differences among the groups. The Conceptual Metaphor-based group outperformed the Conventional-based and Pictorial-based groups. It is recommended that EFL teachers adopt the Conceptual Metaphor-based Approach to deepen proverb understanding and retention. This approach enables learners to uncover the cultural values within proverbs, fostering language proficiency and critical thinking.

Keywords: English as a foreign language (EFL); second language (L2); second language acquisition (SLA); conceptual metaphor theory (CMT); conceptual metaphor-based approach (CMA); conceptual metaphor (CM)

1 Introduction

English proverbs are important in language learning for various reasons. Proverbs provide learners with a window into the values, beliefs, and customs of a culture. By learning proverbs, EFL learners can gain a deeper understanding and appreciation of L2 culture. Also, proverbs often involve figurative language, which can help EFL learners develop their figurative competence, interpret metaphors and idioms, and improve their understanding of English. Moreover, proverbs can introduce EFL learners to new vocabulary and metaphorical expressions, expanding their vocabulary and helping them communicate more effectively in real-life situations. More importantly, proverbs often contain moral lessons that encourage EFL learners to think critically and reflect on the meaning and relevance of proverbs to their own lives. Lastly, learning and using proverbs can improve communication skills, as they are frequently used in everyday conversation and can help EFL learners express themselves more fluently and naturally in English. In general, English metaphorical expressions play a vital role in language learning by providing cultural insights, enhancing figurative competence, building vocabulary, promoting critical thinking, and improving communication skills (Kövecses, 2002; Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; Littlemore & Low, 2006; Mieder, 2004; Norrick, 1985; Taylor, 1985; Winick, 2003).

Despite their significance in language learning, English proverbial and idiomatic expressions pose a challenge for EFL learners due to several factors. First, many English proverbs and idioms are rooted in culture, which may not be familiar to EFL learners, making it hard to understand the meaning and context of these expressions. Second, proverbs and idioms often use figurative language, which can be difficult for EFL learners to comprehend, especially if the figurative meaning is very different from the literal meaning. Third, proverbs and idioms can have multiple meanings, making it challenging for EFL learners to understand the intended meaning in a particular context. In addition, proverbs and idioms are often part of colloquial language, which may not be taught in formal language classes, leading to a lack of exposure for EFL learners. To effectively learn English proverbial and idiomatic expressions, EFL learners require a deep understanding of the language and culture, as well as exposure to real-life situations where these expressions are used (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; Mieder, 2004; Norrick, 1985; Taylor, 1985; Winick, 2003).

1.1 Statement of the problem

Given that research on teaching metaphorical proverbs to EFL learners has not produced a conclusive method, various approaches have been suggested and utilized to improve learners' figurative competence. The present study

was motivated by the disparity between the current state of teaching proverbial expressions and the lack of research on the most effective approach, which could address the limitations of traditional methods and facilitate learners' understanding of the conceptual metaphors underlying proverbial expressions.

1.2 Purpose of the study

Driven by the problem stated above, this study aims to answer the following research question:

1. Are there any statistically significant differences between the effect of the Conventional-based Approach, Pictorial-based Approach, and Conceptual Metaphor-based Approach on facilitating the comprehension of English proverbs?

This question is divided into four sub-questions:

a) Does the Conventional-based Approach have a statistically significant effect on enhancing EFL students' comprehension of English proverbs?
b) Does the Pictorial-based Approach have a statistically significant effect on enhancing EFL students' comprehension of English proverbs?
c) Does the Conceptual Metaphor-based Approach have a statistically significant effect on enhancing EFL students' comprehension of English proverbs?
d) Which of the three approaches (i.e., Conventional-based, Pictorial-based, and Conceptual Metaphor-based) is the most effective approach in terms of facilitating EFL students' comprehension of English proverbs?

1.3 Significance of the study

The significance of this study resides in its examination and evaluation of three approaches employed to enhance EFL students' comprehension of English proverbs. This study makes a valuable contribution to the field of second/foreign language acquisition by presenting statistical evidence supporting the most effective approach for teaching proverbial expressions. The results of this study could potentially assist EFL learners in overcoming the substantial challenges and difficulties associated with understanding metaphorical proverbs and figurative language. Additionally, the study may benefit teachers by presenting alternative and effective approaches to enhance their teaching methods, develop their students' figurative competence, and enrich their students' language learning experience.

2 Literature review

2.1 Definition and features of proverbs

Many attempts have been made to define proverbs; nevertheless, a comprehensive definition which would incorporate all the significant aspects of proverbial phenomena has proven inconceivable. It is paradoxical that a proverb is widely believed to embody simplicity and common sense, but is, in fact, complex and difficult to define (Lau et al., 2004). Defining proverbs is difficult due to the fact that they do not belong to a categorized genre since their origin, content, purpose, structure, and application are so varied and they sometimes give the impression that there is no one entity called a proverb at all (Moon, 1997). It has been concluded that "the definition of a proverb is too difficult to repay the undertaking" (Taylor, 1985, p. 3).

Traditionally, proverbs were viewed as "self-contained, pithy, traditional expressions with didactic content and fixed poetic form" (Norrick, 1985, p. 31). As this view did not provide a clear distinction between proverbs and other traditional genres including as riddles, clichés, slogans, songs, jokes, tales, aphorism, and wellerism, two alternative definitions for proverbs were proposed from ethnographic and supercultural perspectives (Norrick, 1985). An ethnographic definition viewed the proverb as "a traditional, conversational, didactic genre with general meaning, a potential free conversational turn, preferably with figurative meaning" (p. 78). Similarly, a supercultural definition regarded the proverb as "a typically spoken, conversational form with didactic function and not associated with any particular source" (p. 79). According to Winick (2003), proverbs are "brief (sentence-length) strategic utterances which derive a sense of wisdom, wit and authority from explicit and intentional intertextual reference to a tradition of previous similar utterances." (p. 77). Mieder (2004) postulated that a proverb is "a short, generally known sentence of the folk which contains wisdom, truth, morals, and traditional views in a metaphorical, fixed and memorizable form and which is handed down from generation to generation" (119).

Highlighting some features to identify proverbs, Finnegan (1970) described the proverb as "a saying in more or less fixed form marked by shortness, sense and salt and distinguished by the popular acceptance of the truth tersely expressed in it" (p. 383). Mieder (2004, p. 6-7) outlined the common patterns or structural paradigms that help in identifying proverbs such as: Better X than Y (e.g., Better poor with honor than rich with shame); Like X, like Y (e.g., Like father like son); No X without Y (e.g., No work, no pay); One X doesn't make a Y (e.g., One robin doesn't make a spring); and If X, then Y (e.g., If at first you don't succeed, then try, try again). Investigating the stylistic markers of the proverb, several researchers (Arora, 1984; Mieder, 2004; Norrick, 1985) distinguished between internal and external

features of proverbs. The internal markers include hyperbole (e.g., All is fair in love and war); paradox (e.g., The longest way around is the shortest way home); and personification (e.g., Hunger is the best cook). The external markers include alliteration (e.g., Practice makes perfect); parallelism (e.g., Easy come, easy go); rhyme (e.g., A little pot is soon hot); and ellipsis (e.g., More haste, less speed). Mieder (2004) pointed out that most proverbs contain a metaphor (metaphorical proverbs) which can be used in a figurative way and can be applied to a variety of situations and contexts. Mieder (2004) argued that metaphorical proverbs are more popular and favored than non-metaphorical proverbs because "by associating an actual situation with a metaphorical proverb, the particular matter is generalized into a common occurrence of life" (Mieder 2004, p. 8).

2.2 The Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT)

As Cognitive Linguistics investigates the relationship between language, mind, and experience, it no longer views metaphors as linguistic patterns, but rather as cognitive concepts. According to the cognitive linguistic view, metaphors are not just linguistic and rhetorical expressions, but rather, a fundamental cognitive tool that helps us to understand and conceptualize the world. Cognitive linguistic research has demonstrated that metaphor is a crucial element of human thinking, serving a significant function in the human conceptual system. This view challenges the prevailing belief that metaphor is limited to language and suggests, instead, that it is a pervasive aspect of daily life, affecting not only speech but also thought and behavior (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980).

Adhering to the cognitive linguistic view of metaphors, researchers have introduced the Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT) as a theoretical framework for conceptualizing this phenomenon (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). According to the CMT, we use concrete and physical experiences to understand abstract or complex concepts, and these experiences are often expressed through metaphorical language. CMT comprises two key concepts: the conceptual metaphor and the linguistic expression. The conceptual metaphor (CM) involves linking two semantic domains through a mapping process from the source domain to the target domain. In essence, conceptual domain (A) is understood through conceptual domain (B). The two conceptual domains are conventionally written in capital letters to indicate separate domains (e.g., LOVE IS JOURNEY; AN ARGUMENT IS WAR; LIFE IS A STRUGGLE, etc.). The use of capital letters signifies that conceptual metaphors are mental categories that may not necessarily be expressed in language. However, when expressed in language, metaphorical expressions are written in lowercase letters, indicating that conceptual metaphors in a language are conveyed through metaphorical expressions. For example, in the conceptual metaphor TIME IS A VALUABLE COMMODITY, language learners rely on the concrete (source) concept of COMMODITY to comprehend the abstract (target) concept of TIME. Both the source and target domains comprise the conceptual domains that make up the conceptual metaphor denoting that time is a valuable commodity that can be spent, wasted, or saved as can be clearly manifested in the following examples: You're wasting my time; I need to spend my time wisely these days; I've invested a lot of time in this project; You're running out of time; You need to budget your time; He's living on borrowed time; I lost a lot of time when I got sick (Kövecses, 2002; Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; Littlemore & Low, 2006).

By applying the CMT on metaphorical proverbs, it could be concluded that the proverb "A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush" is represented by the conceptual metaphor OPPORTUNITIES ARE ANIMALS in which the abstract (target) concept of OPPORTUNITIES is drawn and comprehended by the concrete (source) concept of ANIMALS. Through metaphorical mapping from the source domain "a bird in the hand" to the target domain "uncertain opportunities", the proverb signifies that the concrete and tangible possession of a bird in one's hand is more valuable than the abstract and uncertain possibility of obtaining two birds in the bush. In other words, the metaphor suggests that it is better to hold onto something certain, rather than to risk losing it by pursuing uncertain possibilities. The proverb is often used to advise caution and to encourage people to appreciate and be content with what they already have, rather than to pursue uncertain or risky opportunities. Similarly, the proverb "Don't put all your eggs in one basket" is embodied by the conceptual metaphor MINIMIZING RISK IS MULTIPLE RESOURCES in which the abstract (target) concept of RESOURCES is mapped and comprehended by the concrete (source) concept of EGGS. Both the source and target domains comprise the conceptual domains that make up the conceptual metaphor. Through metaphorical mapping from the source domain "eggs in the basket" to the target domain "resources in the project", the proverb indicates that one's resources or investments should not be risked all at once, but rather diversified across different channels to minimize the risk of losing everything. This metaphor suggests that it is better to spread one's resources or investments across multiple options, rather than relying on a single option, which could become risky or unreliable. The proverb is often used to advise caution and to encourage people to diversify their investments or options, rather than to put all their resources into a single venture (Kövecses, 2002; Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; Littlemore & Low, 2006).

2.3 Related previous research studies

Teaching figurative language, such as metaphorical, idiomatic, and proverbial expressions, has recently gained some attention in second/foreign language learning. Various approaches and methods have been employed to enhance learners' figurative competence ranging from non-cognitive based approaches (e.g., L1 translation; L2 definition; L2 etymology) to cognitive based approaches (e.g., pictorial elucidation; image schema; conceptual metaphor).

Azad and Ahmadian (2018) compared the effectiveness of three distinct teaching methods (pictures, first language translation, and L2 definition) on the acquisition of English proverbs by pre-intermediate EFL learners. The first group was taught the proverbs with L1 translation, the second group was taught with the definition of the proverbs in L2, and the third group received pictorial images of the proverbs. The analysis of the data showed that, in comparison to the other two methods, the use of pictorial-based approach significantly improved the participants' acquisition of proverbs. Boers et al. (2009) conducted a study with Dutch students to investigate whether using pictorial elucidation to illustrate the meaning of idiomatic expressions would affect idiom comprehension. The study found that using pictures had a distracting effect on the students' comprehension of idioms. However, another study conducted by Nasab and Hesabi (2014) yielded different and contradicting results to Boers' findings. They divided EFL students into two groups, with one group presented with idioms along with definition and examples, and the other presented with idioms along with definition, examples, and pictures. The study found that EFL learners benefit from the use of pictures and illustrations when working with idioms. Jahangard and Sedaghatkar (2019) examined the impact of four different teaching methods (translation, definition, etymology, and imageable expressions) on EFL learners' immediate and delayed retention of idioms in both receptive and productive modes. The study included 120 participants, with 30 learners exposed to idioms through each of the four methods. The results revealed that etymology was the most effective method for delayed retention and productive knowledge phases, while the pictorial method was most effective for immediate retention and receptive knowledge phases. The translation and definition methods ranked lower in effectiveness in both phases. The study suggested that incorporating etymology in the learners' first language and utilizing the pictorial method could facilitate the process of learning idioms.

Shaffer (2005) examined the effectiveness of incorporating cognitive linguistic concepts, such as conceptual metaphor and image schema, in teaching English proverbs compared to a conventional teaching method. Additionally, the study aimed to determine the impact of including rich mental images that activate image schemas on the learning rate of proverbs compared to teaching methods that use conceptual metaphors alone or a conventional teaching method that doesn't use either of these concepts. Three experimental groups were formed, including a Conventional group taught proverbs by explaining their meanings, a Metaphor group taught the same proverbs with two conceptual metaphors for each, and an Image group presented with the proverbs' meanings and two conceptual metaphors, with a focus on creating rich mental imagery to activate image schemas. The study found that the Image group outperformed the Conventional and Metaphor groups, indicating that incorporating motivating conceptual metaphors and related mental imagery into instructional material for teaching proverbs is more effective than a conventional teaching method or using motivating conceptual metaphors alone. Li (2002) conducted a study on 394 Chinese undergraduates with intermediate to advanced levels of English to investigate the effectiveness of the conceptual metaphor-based and image schema-based approaches on learning metaphorical expressions, idioms, and proverbs. The study consisted of five experiments that focused on metaphorical expressions, idioms, and proverbs. The first four experiments aimed to test the impact of presenting conceptual metaphor information through different methods, such as a ten-minute discussion with the teacher, being informed about conceptual metaphors, and actively engaging with the data. In experiments 3 and 4, experimental groups either drew or looked at images. The study's findings revealed that students in the experimental groups who engaged in the cognitive-based activities were able to recall the form and meaning of metaphorical expressions, idioms, and proverbs significantly better than those in the control groups who were given memory-based tasks. Vasiljevic (2011) probed whether making learners aware of the underlying conceptual metaphors (CM) would aid in their retention of the meaning and form of idiomatic expressions. The study compared four learning conditions: 1) idiomatic expressions grouped by CM with definitions and example sentences in English, 2) idiomatic expressions grouped by CM with definitions and example sentences translated into Japanese (the students' L1), 3) semantically unrelated idiomatic expressions with definitions and example sentences in English, and 4) semantically unrelated idiomatic expressions with definitions and example sentences translated into Japanese. The results indicated that grouping idiomatic expressions by conceptual metaphors enhances understanding, and introducing underlying concepts in the students' first language is more effective in aiding their understanding of CM-motivated instruction.

The current study employed metaphorical proverbs in order to compare the effect of the three approaches: 1) Conventional-based, 2) Pictorial-based, and 3) Conceptual Metaphor-based on facilitating EFL students' comprehension of English proverbs.

3 Method

3.1 Research design

Three EFL intact classes were randomly selected to conduct a quasi-experimental pre-test, post-test research study. Some selected English proverbs were introduced to the three classes employing different approaches. The first class (22 students) was taught English proverbs through the Conventional-based Approach. The second class (25 students) was presented with English proverbs through the Pictorial-based Approach. The third class (23 students) was introduced to English proverbs through the Conceptual Metaphor-based Approach. All the three groups had pre- and post-tests before and after the intervention and the scores of the three groups were compared to determine whether there were any differences in the effect of the three approaches on the comprehension of the target English proverbs.

3.2 Participants

This study included 70 male EFL Arab students at Imam Mohammad Ibn Saud University (IMSIU), Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. Studying English as a foreign language, the participants were determined to have an intermediate proficiency level based on the University Placement Test, indicating a homogeneous sample.

3.3 Instruments & procedures

3.3.1 Pre-test

A pre-test was conducted to the three groups on the first week to measure the participants' background knowledge on English proverbs. Based on the pre-test results, the familiar and known proverbs were crossed out and replaced by other unfamiliar and unknown proverbs on the post-test. After conducting the pre-test, the intervention was introduced by exposing the three groups to the target English proverbs in three different modes: the Conventional-based group, the Pictorial-based group, and the Conceptual Metaphor-based group.

3.3.2 Post-test

A post-test was conducted on the last week to examine the effect of the three approaches on the participants' comprehension of the target English proverbs and to find out whether they were any differences between the three groups.

3.3.4 Validity & reliability

To ensure their validity, the study instruments were confirmed by three EFL colleagues. The instruments were also pilot tested on another sample of the same population to ensure their reliability. The Cronbach's Alpha reliability coefficients of the two instruments: pre-test ($\alpha = .86$) and post-test ($\alpha = .89$) indicated a high internal consistency.

3.3.5 Procedure

The present study adopted a quasi-experimental, three-group design to compare the effect of the three approaches: 1) Conventional-based, 2) Pictorial-based, and 3) Conceptual Metaphor-based on facilitating EFL students' comprehension of English proverbs. The study was carried out over a period of 5 weeks and a total of 10 sessions. The target English proverbs were allocated 20 minutes of each class session to be presented according to the assigned approach. A number of 30 English proverbs were presented to the participants in all three groups (3 proverbs per session). The target English proverbs were selected from several sources including: The Oxford Dictionary of Proverbs (Speake, 2008) and A Dictionary of American Proverbs (Mieder, 1992).

In the Conventional-based group, students were presented with the target English proverbs in a traditional manner without any pictorial elucidation and without referring to the cognitive motivation that underlies and matches them together. The students were familiarized with proverb meanings and examples and were encouraged to memorize them (rote-learning) through continual repetition as shown in the following example.

Don't count your chickens before they're hatched.

Meaning: Don't expect a positive result before you actually see it.

Example:

A: "This idea is going to make me millions of dollars!"

B: "Whoa. Let's slow down. Don't count your chickens before they're hatched."

In the Pictorial-based group, students were introduced to the meaning of the target English proverbs along with pictures which elucidated the literal meaning of the words constituting the selected proverbs as shown in the following example.

Don't count your chickens before they're hatched

Meaning: Don't expect a positive result before you actually see it.

Examples:
A: “This idea is going to make me millions of dollars!”
B: “Whoa. Let’s slow down. Don’t count your chickens before they’re hatched.”
Pictorial Elucidation: [Students are introduced to a picture of chickens and eggs along with the proverb: Don’t count your chickens before they’re hatched].

In the Conceptual Metaphor-based group, students were presented with the same target English proverbs with their underlying conceptual metaphors, which are believed to motivate the proverbs and link them to their meanings as shown in the following example.

Don’t count your chickens before they’re hatched.
Meaning: Don’t expect a positive result before you actually see it.
Example:
A: “This idea is going to make me millions of dollars!”
B: “Whoa. Let’s slow down. Don’t count your chickens before they’re hatched.”
Conceptual Metaphor: CHANGE OF STATE IS CHANGE OF POSSESSION

3.4 Data collection

By utilizing the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) software, the means and standard deviations were computed to identify the mean scores of the three groups. Then, a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted to investigate whether there were any statistically significant differences between the three groups. A post hoc comparison, using Tukey's honestly significant difference (HSD) was computed to find out where the statistically significant differences occurred between groups and to identify which of the three approaches (i.e., Conventional-based, Pictorial-based, and Conceptual Metaphor-based) was the most effective in facilitating the participants’ comprehension of English proverbs. The significance level in all statistical analyses was set at $p < .05$.

4 Results

The pre-test was conducted to measure the participants’ background knowledge on English proverbs. The results (Table 1) showed that the mean scores of the three groups: the Conventional-based group (M = 13.27), the Pictorial-based group (M = 13.00), and the Conceptual Metaphor-based group (M = 13.34) were almost equal. To confirm this, The ANOVA was computed and the results (Table 2) revealed that there were no statistically significant differences between the three groups: Conventional-based, Pictorial-based, and Conceptual Metaphor-based: ($F(2,67) = 0.06324$, $p = .9388$), which denoted that all the three groups were equal in their background knowledge of English proverbs before the treatment/intervention of the three approaches.

Tab. 1: Descriptive results of pre-test

Group	N	M	SD
Conventional	22	13.27	1.30
Pictorial	25	13.00	0.97
Conceptual Metaphor	23	13.34	1.24
Total	70	13.20	1.17

Tab. 2: ANOVA results of pre-test

Group	SS	df	MS	F	Sig.
Between Groups	1.619	2	0.8095	0.06324	.9388
Within Groups	857.5811	67	12.7997		
Total	859.2001	69			

The post-test was conducted to examine the effect of the three approaches on the participants’ comprehension of the target English proverbs and to find out whether they were any differences between them. The results (Table 3) demonstrated that there were some discrepancies between the mean scores of the three groups: the Conventional-based group (M = 16.13), the Pictorial-based group (M = 20.32), and the Conceptual Metaphor-based group (M = 24.00) which denoted an overall improvement in the participants’ comprehension of the target proverbs after applying the three approaches. To find out whether there were any significant difference, ANOVA was calculated and the results (Table 3) yielded a statistically significant difference between the three groups: Conventional-based, Pictorial-based, and Conceptual Metaphor-based: ($F(2,67) = 28.7031$, $p = .000$).

Tab. 3: Descriptive results of post-test

Group	N	M	SD
Conventional	22	16.13	1.18
Pictorial	25	20.32	1.40
Conceptual Metaphor	23	24.00	0.98
Total	70	20.15	1.18

Tab. 4: ANOVA results of post-test

Group	SS	df	MS	F	Sig.
Between Groups	695.7547	2	347.8774	28.7031	.000
Within Groups	812.0309	67	12.1199		
Total	1507.7856	69			

To find out where the statistically significant difference occurred between groups, a post hoc comparison, using Tukey's Honestly Significant Difference (HSD), was conducted. The results of Tukey's HSD (Table 5) revealed that the Conceptual Metaphor-based group significantly outperformed the Conventional-based group and the Pictorial-based group. It was also found that the Pictorial-based group significantly outperformed the Conventional-based group.

Tab. 5: Tukey's HSD post hoc test for multiple comparison of means for groups on the post-test

(I) Group	(J) Group	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.
Conventional	Pictorial	-4.19*	0.71	.000
	Conceptual Metaphor	-7.87*	0.71	.000
Pictorial	Conventional	4.19*	0.71	.000
	Conceptual Metaphor	-3.68*	0.71	.000
Conceptual Metaphor	Conventional	7.87*	0.71	.000
	Pictorial	3.68*	0.71	.000

5 Discussion & conclusion

The aim of this study was to investigate the effect of three different approaches on facilitating EFL students' comprehension of English proverbs. The participants in the three experimental groups were taught the same selected English proverbs in three different modes (Conventional-based, Pictorial-based, and Conceptual Metaphor-based). Based on the study findings, there was a significant difference between the Conventional-based Approach, Pictorial-based Approach, and Conceptual Metaphor-based Approach in terms of their effect on enhancing L2 learners' comprehension of the target English proverbs. It was found that students' comprehension in the Conceptual Metaphor-based group significantly outperformed their counterparts in the Conventional-based group and the Pictorial-based group. It was also concluded that the Pictorial-based group significantly surpassed their counterparts in the Conventional-based group.

The results of the current study are in line with previous studies which provided statistical significance for using the Conceptual Metaphor-based Approach in teaching and learning proverbial expressions (Azad and Ahmadian, 2018; Colston, 1995; Shaffer, 2005), idiomatic expressions (Kövecses, 2001; Li, 2002; Vasiljevic, 2011; Samani, 2012), phrasal verbs (Karahan, 2015; Morgan, 1997; Neagu, 2007; Nhu & Huyen, 2009; Qhorbanian & Safaei Ghalati, 2016), vocabulary (Beréndi et al., 2008; Boers, 2000; Boers, 2004; Fang, 2014), and L2 culture awareness (Boers,

2003; Boers & Demecheleer, 2001; Caballero & Díaz-Vera, 2013; Charteris-Black, 2001; Ibarretxe-Antuñano, 2013; Kövecses, 2003; Littlemore, 2003).

The present study seems to agree with the above-mentioned studies that the teaching of proverbial, idiomatic, and figurative expressions poses a challenge for EFL learners due to several reasons. First, proverbs and idioms often have figurative meanings that are not directly related to the literal meaning of the words used, making them difficult to understand. Second, metaphorical expressions are often culturally specific and may not have equivalents in the learners' native language, which can lead to confusion and difficulties in comprehending their meaning. Third, proverbial and idiomatic expressions can vary in their usage and meaning depending on the context, which adds another layer of complexity for learners. Finally, figurative expressions are often used colloquially in informal speech, making it challenging for learners to recognize them and understand their meaning in everyday conversations.

However, the Conceptual Metaphor Approach (CMA) offers an effective pedagogical strategy and a comprehensive framework for teaching proverbial, idiomatic, and metaphorical expressions to EFL learners. As this approach is grounded in Lakoff and Johnson's (1980) Conceptual Metaphor Theory, it suggests that metaphors are more than just linguistic expressions; they are fundamental to human thought and understanding. By focusing on the underlying metaphors that structure these expressions, learners can develop a deeper and more intuitive understanding of the language. To incorporate the CMA into instruction and syllabus, EFL teachers can group metaphorical proverbs based on their underlying conceptual metaphors and teach them in a coherent and structured way. This can help students to better understand the connections between different proverbs and the concepts they represent. Another effective way to incorporate the CMA into the EFL classroom instruction and syllabus is by including activities that focus on the identification and explanation of the conceptual metaphors underlying the target proverbs. For example, teachers can provide students with a list of metaphorical proverbs, and ask them to identify the conceptual metaphors that underlie each proverb. Students can then discuss the meaning of the proverbs in light of the identified conceptual metaphors. Moreover, teachers can help learners to connect the metaphor with their own experiences and the cultural background. For instance, in the case of the metaphor TIME IS A MOVING OBJECT, teachers could discuss how people perceive time passing quickly when they are enjoying themselves, and how this is a universal experience across cultures. Teachers can also use real-life examples to illustrate the use of these metaphorical proverbs in context. This can help students to understand the practical application of these proverbs and how they are used in everyday conversation. In addition, teachers can use visual aids, such as images or videos, to help students understand the underlying concept of the proverb or idiom. Teachers can also encourage students to create their own images or visual representations of the proverbial and idiomatic expressions to reinforce their understanding. Last but not least, teachers can compare and contrast different metaphors used in the target language and their equivalents in the learners' native language. This will help learners to see both the similarities and differences between the languages and to develop their intercultural competence. Overall, by using the Conceptual Metaphor-based Approach in their instruction, teachers can help EFL learners develop a deeper understanding and better retention of English proverbial, idiomatic, and figurative expressions and make their language learning experience more engaging and meaningful.

Future studies may investigate the effect of L1 vs L2 similarities/differences with regard to the conceptual metaphors on students' L2 acquisition of metaphorical proverbs. Further research may also be carried out to examine EFL teachers' and students' perceptions toward teaching and learning metaphorical proverbs and idiomatic expressions via the Conceptual Metaphor-based Approach. As the scope of this research was limited to learners' comprehension, a future study might be conducted to investigate the effect of the three approaches on students' production. It is worth noting that the results of this study should not be overgeneralized as its scope was limited to Arabic-speaking EFL learners with intermediate-level studying at a public university in Saudi Arabia.

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